

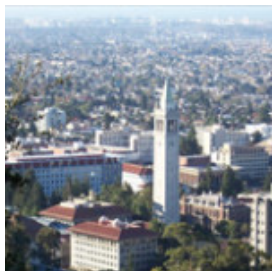
The Louis D. Brandeis Center Blog



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Berkeley Student Senate Guts Anti-Israel Divestment Resolution

Posted on May 5, 2013 by brandeis



University of California at
Berkeley

The University of California's long, ugly battle over anti-Israel divestment has just gotten even messier. Brandeis readers will recall that Berkeley's student senate passed a resolution on April 18 urging divestment from companies that do business with Israel. Berkeley's Chancellor Robert Birgeneau immediately repudiated the measure and announced that it would have no impact on university policy. Nevertheless, the whole situation was bad enough to draw additional legal challenges from the lawyers who had previously filed a federal anti-Semitism complaint against the Berkeley campus. Now, the anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) faces another blow as Berkeley student senators have revised the resolution to remove most of its operative provisions. Moreover, as details of the resolution come to light, some commentators now argue that the resolution harms the BDS movement itself more than it does the State of Israel and its supporters.

As the *Daily Californian* reports, student senators have removed the clauses that dealt with the student senate's own investments and appropriations, which are the only funds that they control. The senate has removed these operative provisions in order to settle charges that the divestment resolution violated the institution's constitution because it was not passed by a two thirds majority. Some insiders argue that this move neuters the anti-Israel resolution.

"I think SB 160 has lost a lot of weight through this settlement," said Noah Ickowitz, SQUELCH! party chair and a former columnist for The Daily Californian. "The bill that passed is now a completely different bill once these clauses are stricken. It loses almost all its authority. I hope the public understands that this is no longer ASUC divestment."

Others insist that the amendment did not substantially change the resolution, since it never amounted to anything but symbolism anyhow.

Student Action Senator George Kadifa, who authored the bill, disagreed that the settlement watered down the bill in any way, emphasizing that the purpose of the bill has been largely symbolic since its inception.

To the extent that the Berkeley resolution was merely symbolic, its meaning will be difficult to ascertain. In fact, some commentators have argued that the boycott resolution was never as much a victory for the BDS movement as most

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people believed. Indeed, Berkeley Professor [Ron Hassner has argued](#) that UC Berkeley “killed BDS” by passing a resolution which includes language which is critical not only of Israel but also of the BDS movement. Hassner argues that the Berkeley boycott resolution was unique in that anti-Israel student leaders distanced themselves from the BDS movement and its international leader, Omar Barghouti. In his *Times of Israel* blog, Hassner explained this difference:

In the past, all efforts to divest from companies doing business with Israel (the only state against which University of California students are calling for divestment) were authored by the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanction) movement, an international organization that rejects Israel’s existence and seeks to replace it with a Palestinian state. At Berkeley, astute student leaders recognized BDS as the true author of the bill and refused to pass it unless the resolution explicitly denounced that movement.

Hassner explains that Berkeley’s anti-Israel resolution included in five separate places “language saying the resolution ‘does not support Omar Barghouti, the leader of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), and his end goal of a one-state solution that would replace the state of Israel.’” The resolution added that Barghouti’s BDS movement “calls on a cultural and academic boycott, which hurts more people than just policymakers, is counterproductive to academic and cultural growth, and is an inherently different tactic than divesting from companies.” For all of these reasons, Hassner described the Berkeley divestment resolution as a “comprehensive rejection of BDS.”

Hassner’s perspective is interesting. The Berkeley resolution is clearly a bold denunciation of the State of Israel, even if it also denounces the anti-Israel movement itself. This certainly is a sign of fractures within the BDS movement. More than that, it reflects the tortured logic of anti-Israel resolutions and the awkward positions which student governments must take when they are forced to confront divestment resolutions. The BDS movement’s reputation is now sullied even in places like Berkeley where Israel is subjected to the most virulent attacks.



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